

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 001353

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [KMPI](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: GOJ-PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS DISPUTE STILL SIMMERING

REF: A. AMMAN 709

[B.](#) AMMAN 571

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: The professional associations continue to challenge the government's ban on its "political activity" (refs). The like-minded opposition political parties have now taken up the cause, calling for more public freedoms during a sit-in in front of the Parliament building on February 13. Meanwhile, the GOJ banned a planned meeting of the Engineers' Association on February 14, and the Amman governor issued another memorandum to the Associations' leadership reiterating the government's position. Minister of Interior Samir Habashneh will appear before Parliament on February 20 to answer questions about the GOJ's handling of the situation. Arab unionists in Cairo called on King Abdullah to end the conflict. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The government's clash with the professional associations has continued on a slow boil. Like-minded opposition political parties have rallied around the associations, organizing a sit-in in front of the Parliament building on February 13 under the slogan "defending public freedoms." The governor of Amman granted permission for the event, which as reported in the local media was attended by around 300 individuals. The protesters ended the gathering 20 minutes early because, according to statements by organizers quoted in the press, "unknown persons penetrated the gathering and tried to damage the (rally)." They accused the "infiltrators" of trying to fight with protesters and attempting to seize their banners. Afterwards, the Coordinating Committee of the opposition political parties publicly accused the Ministry of Interior of trying to sabotage a legal sit-in. Spokesman for the Committee Dr. Sa'id Theyab said that they had decided to send a memo to King Abdullah emphasizing the deterioration of public freedoms under the current government.

¶3. (U) The government is standing firm. The Amman governor on February 13 sent a memo to the associations reiterating the GOJ's demand that they commit themselves to professional concerns only and avoid "political activity." He also banned a planned seminar on February 14 by the Jordan Engineers' Association (JEA) to discuss members' "professional rights" and "national concerns." According to JEA president Wa'el al-Saqqa: "A large number of police officers surrounded the Professional Associations Complex and prevented anyone from entering."

¶4. (U) Following a request from Islamic Action Front MP Ali Abu Sukkar, Interior Minister Samir Habashneh will appear before Parliament on February 20 to answer questions about the conflict with the professional associations, including the GOJ's use of force to break up a rally on January 26 that resulted in injuries. (Note: Article 96 of the Jordanian constitution gives any MP the right to request the appearance of any minister before Parliament to address "public matters." End note.) GOJ spokesperson Asma Khader had told reporters on January 31 that the GOJ was investigating the allegations of police brutality: "Of course, there was no government decision to attack anyone. If such an attack did take place, those responsible will be held accountable."

¶5. (U) Meanwhile, Arab unionists outside Jordan have taken up the cause. The Union of the Arab Professional Associations at the end of its meeting in Cairo on February 12 announced that it had sent a letter to King Abdullah requesting him to intervene in the situation.

¶6. (C) Comment: Both sides appear to be holding their ground, but the longer the conflict persists, the longer the more the government stands to lose. A main goal of the GOJ's crackdown was to contain the vehement anti-Israel and anti-U.S. speech emanating from the professional associations, particularly its anti-normalization activity that targeted supposed supporters of Israel. The GOJ's heavy-handed approach has, however, galvanized the (legal) opposition political parties to rally round the associations and has given fodder to the argument that the government does not value public freedoms. The crackdown will not end the anti-Israel and anti-U.S. messages, but

may only push the oppositionist parties (whose membership tends to overlap with the professional associations) to assume the lead on championing these causes.

17. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
HALE